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**TESTING SPEAKING in 2nd AND 3rd CYCLES
AT CAPEVERDEAN EFL CLASSROOMS.**

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Abstract

This study aims to identify the constraints that complicate the assessment of speaking in Capeverdean EFL classrooms. A literature review was conducted on studies already done in the field of testing speaking in EFL Capeverdean classrooms. The study was carried out using qualitative method with some Capeverdean secondary school English teachers. The participants answered a questionnaire that asked teachers opinions and experiences about speaking assessment. The study found that Capeverdean English teachers do not adequately assess their students speaking ability. Therefore, the study pointed out the constraints of the Capeverdean context that complicate the assessment of speaking in EFL classrooms. The teachers reported the main constraints in order of significance as **large classes, difficulty in marking oral tests, difficulty in designing oral tests and difficulty in separating the speaking skill from the listening skill**. It concluded that Capeverdean English teachers need assistance with new tools to assess speaking in their classrooms. Thus, the author will make some suggestions, first to the Ministry of Education and then to English teachers in the field to assist them with the implementation of regular oral testing in Cape Verdean English classrooms.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The topic of this thesis is testing speaking at 2nd and 3rd cycle in Capeverdean EFL classrooms. I chose this topic because I believe that the speaking skill is one of the most important parts of an EFL course since teaching a language is to teach people how to communicate effectively in the language, that is, how to become a fluent speaker of that language.

However, the problem of many Capeverdean students being unable to speak English is well known among teachers and learners. Since I was at high school, I have been asking myself: why did not my teachers assess students' speaking skills? Why are many Capeverdean students who graduate from high school unable to hold an everyday conversation in English? Many students may regard speaking as a "less serious" skill since they are not required to perform on oral exams. As Hughes (1989) states, "areas which are not tested are likely to become areas ignored in teaching and learning" (p. 23).

Thus, if English teachers are aware of the importance of speaking the language, then, they should assess their students' speaking ability regularly so that they can be informed about the proficiency level of their students' speaking skill and help them to improve their fluency. "Oral communication classes should help, but if they are not reinforced with a meaningful speaking test there is a risk that they will not be taken seriously" (Evans, p. 12).

However, one of the hardest tasks in EFL classrooms faced by Capeverdean teachers is the assessment of learners' speaking ability. In fact, it has been noted that little attention has been given to the assessment of learners' oral performance in the target language. This is because oral tests are difficult to deal with. Consequently, the assessment of the speaking skills has been neglected.

Therefore, bearing in mind these concerns, the purpose of this paper is to encourage Capeverdean 2nd and 3rd cycle teachers to test speaking skills and provide them with some oral

testing techniques that most suit the difficulties they face. In order to achieve this goal a study will be conducted to answer the question: **what are the constraints in Capeverdean EFL classrooms that complicate the assessment of speaking?** Thus, this paper aims to identify the constraints that affect the assessment of speaking. It also aims to provide some techniques that can be used to measure testees oral performance. Finally, the purpose of this paper is to encourage English teachers to test their students speaking ability so that they can enable them to communicate effectively in the target language.

The research will be carried out through a literature review on studies already done on testing speaking in EFL classrooms and a research in the field. This field research will consist of having Capeverdean secondary English teachers to answer a questionnaire, which asks for information about teachers' experiences on speaking assessment.

This thesis consists of five chapters. The first chapter is this introduction, which highlights the objectives of this project and the methodology used in order to answer the research question. The second chapter will provide the background information about testing speaking in EFL classrooms, through a review of the literature in this area. The third chapter describes the research methodology of the field research conducted in Cape Verde. The fourth chapter presents the results, found in the field, and their analysis in comparison to the literature review. Finally, chapter five concludes the paper and make some suggestions for Cape Verdean teachers concerning the assessment of speaking skills

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Understanding Testing

In order to understand the constraints that affect the assessment of speaking and to be able to make recommendations based on those constraints, first it is important to understand the concept of testing in general and testing speaking specifically.

It is difficult to define testing because there are many different definitions. According to the Macmillan English Dictionary (2002), “Testing is the activity of giving someone or something an examination, or checking something to find out if it works” (p.1483). The American Heritage Dictionary of the English language (2000) online also presents a similar definition for testing. It defines testing as the act of subjecting to experimental assessment in order to determine how well something works (np). Additionally, Davies (1990) states that “Testing is a method of providing information that may be used for teaching and other purposes” (p.24).

Language testing is the specific type of testing related to this paper. Spolsky (1995) claims that the testing of foreign language has become a very important activity around the world. “Every year, large number of students have their knowledge of a second or foreign language, mostly English, tested” (p.133). In addition, according to Evans in his online article, Oral Testing, about language testing, testing is a complex subject and most English teachers have not been well trained in marking, administering, grading, and interpreting tests. Teachers may have misconceptions about what testing is, what is being tested in a particular test and how the results of the test can be interpreted and used (p. 14).

Language testing is an indispensable part of language teaching and its main purpose is to evaluate learners on their knowledge of grammar and vocabulary and other items that have been

taught to them. Thus, a language test seeks to find out what learners have learned from the previous instruction. Testing is a normal extension of classroom work, providing teachers and students with useful information that can serve each as a source for improvement. Heaton (1975) states that, “a good classroom test will help locate the precise areas of difficulty encountered by the class or by the individual student. Just as it is necessary for the doctor first to diagnose the patient’s illness, so it is equally necessary for the teacher to diagnose the student’s weaknesses / difficulties” (p.6).

In short, testing is a way of evaluating learners’ knowledge about the content being taught in the classroom. It is a vital part of teaching because through assessment, teachers can check learners’ progress in the language and help them perceive the effectiveness of a course curriculum. However, it may be a complex task if teachers do not have a clear understanding of the concept and its purpose. Now that we understand testing in general and testing language specifically, we should address oral testing, specifically.

2.2. Understanding Oral Testing

Communicative language tests are intended to measure how the testees are able to use language in real situations. Oral testing is special because it deals with the use of the target language in a real context. It does not require learners to use any kind of material such as paper, pen or pencil. Learners have to speak to the examiner and they are assessed on their speech. According to Underhill (1987), in a speaking test people meet face to face and talk to each other. “The test may not even exist, in the same way that a written test does, on paper” (p.3). This means that in an oral test, testees are not required to understand written materials as in other kinds of tests. Thus, the tester and testees carry on a conversation about a given topic and testees are graded on their speech.

According to Hartley and Sporing (1999) cited by Sook in his online article intitled Asian EFL Journal, oral proficiency has become one of the most important issues in language testing since the role of the speaking ability has become more central in language teaching (np.). Thus, learners should have more opportunities to practice the language in the classroom and they

should be tested on that practice. For instance, in Cape Verde many students have poor speaking abilities and this may be because they do not have the opportunity to practice this skill in the classroom. The practice and testing of the oral skill should be part of every Cape Verdean classroom.

Now that the concept of testing in general and testing speaking specifically have been defined, the next section will focus on the relationship between testing and teaching.

2.3 The Relationship Between Teaching and Testing

The relationship between testing and teaching is an important factor when discussing testing in general and testing speaking specifically. This relationship must be fully understood in order to understand the constraints faced by Capeverdean EFL teachers and how those teachers can solve those constraints. Heaton (1975) describes the strong relationship between testing and teaching when he states:

A large number of examinations in the past have encouraged a tendency to separate testing from teaching. Both testing and teaching are so closely interrelated that it is virtually impossible to work in either field without being constantly concerned with the other. Tests may be constructed primarily as devices to reinforce learning and to motivate the student or primarily as a means of assessing the student's performance in the language. In the former case, the test is geared to the teaching that has taken place, whereas in the latter case the teaching is often geared largely to the test. (p.5)

In this statement, the author emphasizes the interdependence between testing and teaching. In fact, testing and teaching provide useful information to one another. Testing can help teachers determine the speed of the instruction given in the classroom. In addition, testing is a useful tool at the beginning of the school year. For instance, by applying a diagnostic test, teachers become more informed about the knowledge their students brought from their previous instruction. Moreover, through assessment teachers are able to determine whether their students are capable to apply what they have learned. Thus, it is impossible to separate testing from teaching. Thus, both testing and teaching are essential in the learning process. First, we teach and then we check the learner's performance in the language. Moreover, through the results of the test we can make

decisions about our teaching methodology and materials used in the classroom. As Madsen points out, “our tests can help us answer the important question: have I been effective in my teaching?” (p.5).

“Language testing is central to language teaching. It provides goals for language teaching, and monitors, for both teachers and learners, success in reaching those goals” (Davies, 1990, p 24). Davies demonstrates that testing is directly linked to teaching and testing is needed to help teachers make decisions about learners’ linguistic ability. Madsen (1983) claims that “Testing is an important part of every teaching and learning experience” (p.3).

Therefore, assessment becomes an “indicative tool that provides feedback to the learner and the teacher about the suitability of the curriculum and instructional resources, the efficacy of the teaching methods, and the strengths and weaknesses of the students” (Shaaban, 2001, p.17). In addition, Sanders (1990) believes that student assessment is an essential part of teaching and “good teaching cannot exist without good student assessment” (p.30).

In short, testing and teaching are directly interrelated. Testing is a method of gaining information about the usefulness of a course and the progress learners make in the language. Testing and teaching provide information to one another; therefore, they cannot be understood as separate entities. Indeed, Puhl (1997) claims that “it has been generally accepted that testing greatly influences instruction and narrow testing has meant narrow instruction” (p.2). Thus, testing reinforces learning, motivates learners and gathers information about learners’ learning development. Therefore, as stated by authors discussed in this work, in order to develop the positive link between testing and teaching, teachers need to analyze the objectives of the test and be able to select appropriate materials and procedures that better serve the objectives. The test tells teachers what the students can and cannot do with the language, and therefore, how successful the teaching has been. It also shows if further teaching is needed by pointing out students’ weaknesses and strengths. This section focused on the relationship between testing and teaching, the following section will focus on the impact of testing on teaching and learning.

2.4 Understanding Backwash in Testing Speaking

The concept of backwash is fundamental to understand testing in the classroom and it will play an important role in understanding oral testing and the constraints that Cape Verdean teachers face.

The following authors present similar definitions of backwash as the direct and indirect effects of examinations on teaching methods. Specifically, Hughes (1989) claims that backwash is the effect of testing on teaching and learning (p. 1). “Backwash” (also known as washback) is sometimes used as a synonym of “impact”, but it is more frequently used to refer to the effects of tests on teaching and learning” (Spolsky, 1995, p. 133). This means that testing influences teaching and learning as well.

Thus, Backwash is an important component in testing, and testing speaking is no exception. As we can notice from the definitions previously presented, that backwash influences both teaching and learning and it can be beneficial or harmful. In fact, according to an online article written by Evans, entitled Oral Testing, backwash can be either positive or negative depending on whether the test encourages or discourages the teaching and learning behaviours that teachers wish to encourage. For instance, if the exam encourages students to achieve the goals of the syllabus, then the backwash effect is positive. Thus, if conversation is the aim of teaching, the exam should encourage students and teachers to spend time on speaking. Evans also agrees that an “oral exam could ensure that the positive backwash effect would lead to more classroom time being spent on developing the skills necessary to communicate” (p.12). In other words, positive backwash encourages learners to use the language in the classroom. That is, once they know they will take oral tests, they will dedicate more time and attention to spoken communication.

On the other hand, Evans states that negative backwash means the contrary, that is, the exam does not encourage learners to achieve the goals of the syllabus. For example, if the goal of English at school is for students to be able to speak the language, but speaking is not practiced in the classroom and the exams do not require them to speak, then the backwash will be negative. The exams will have little positive impact on encouraging speaking since students know that practicing speaking is not necessary. Therefore, they will not devote any time to it (p. 12).

In summary, backwash is the influence of testing on instruction and it has a powerful influence on motivating learners. Positive backwash encourages learners to use the language in

the classroom and therefore, achieve the aims of the course. Thus, if learners are tested on their speaking ability, they feel more motivated to learn to speak. However, if they are not tested on speaking the language, they may soon get demotivated and lose interest in learning to speak. In this case, the backwash effect may be harmful. We have seen the impact of backwash on testing speaking. The next section is concerned with the importance of assessing learners' oral performance in the language.

2.5 The Importance of Testing Speaking

Most of us would probably agree that the oral skills are the most important ones, especially if the goal of the language course is to enable students to communicate in English. Although there are some constraints in speaking assessment, testing the ability to speak is an important aspect of language testing. The assessment of the speaking skill is of great importance because it provides information about learners' oral fluency in the target language. "Speaking is an important component because it will give a clear idea of the student's ability" (Fujikawa, p.1). Since the main purpose of teaching a foreign language is to enable learners to communicate effectively in the language, teachers should assess their students' ability to perform in the language. Brown and Yule (1983) point out that, "The main aims of most English teachers are to make their students able to communicate information effectively in spoken English. In pursuing this aim, the teacher may wish to be able to assess, at regular intervals, to check how his students are progressing and also to find out if there are areas of performance which are consistently weak and require additional attention" (p. 103). This means that the main purpose of teaching a language is enable learners to communicate freely in that language. Thus, teachers should test learners' ability to speak regularly so that they can help them where necessary.

Additionally, Jones (1977) cited by Sook in his online article entitled Asian EFL Journals claims that, "if it is important to know if a person can speak a second language, then it should be important to test that person's speaking ability" (n.p). This means that if we teach a language, then it is necessary to evaluate learners' oral proficiency in the language, that is, to check if they are able to hold an everyday conversation in that language. Also, as was discussed in section 2.3, if learners know that they will be tested on speaking, they will regard speaking as an important

skill. Therefore, they will give more attention to oral communication.

Underhill (1987) points out that, “to give a test is like asking a question, that is, it is a request for information” (P.11). This means that when we apply a test to our students we are asking for information about the progress they are making. However, if we do not assess their ability to use the language correctly in everyday situations, they will never know if our students are able to express themselves in the target language.

The following authors argue that the assessment of learners’ speaking ability encourages them to understand the importance of practicing the language in classroom or even outside classroom. Doff (1988) points out that “if we want to encourage students to speak, we should give them oral tests from time to time; otherwise, students will always regard speaking as less “serious” than the other skills” (p. 266). In other words, in order to show learners that the speaking skill is important as well, we should assess their speaking ability regularly. Thus, the oral test encourages them to speak. Davies (1990) claims that, “if spoken language is not tested, it will not be taught” (p.24). Many learners tend to neglect the speaking skills since they know that they will not be tested on their speaking ability. This reality affects many Capoverdeans EFL students. They do not regard speaking as an important skill since they are not required to perform on oral examination.

There are some practical reasons for Capeverdeans to learn English and be able to speak it fluently. Firstly, because this country is a tourist- based economy and people who work in this field need to know foreign languages, mostly English, which is an international language, spoken by millions of people around the world. In addition, English is the language that follows the technological revolution, the language of computers and air traffic control. Secondly, many employees need to use the English language in their jobs. The use of the English language is very important for making business with foreign countries and for prosperity in the market place. Regarding this, the Ministry of Education English Syllabus for the second cycle, highlights the importance of English in Cape Verde. (...) “*O papel importante da língua inglesa para o desenvolvimento de Cabo Verde, oficialmente reconhecido (...)*”¹ (Gonçalves, 1997, p.1).

In addition, some Capeverdean students attend university courses in English speaking countries. Therefore, they need to know English and be able to hold a conversation in order to achieve their academic and personal purposes.

¹ The importance of the role of English in the development of Cape Verde is officially recognized.

Another reason that speaking English is important is that the desire to work abroad is prevalent in Cape Verde, mostly for young people. For example, many Capeverdeans live in the United States where English is the native language. Thus, it could be helpful for them to be familiar with the language. Being able to speak English fluently will help them integrate in the society. They will have fewer difficulties in finding work. As Omaggio (1993) points out, oral proficiency in a second language can be an important benefit for “anyone seeking employment in business and industry in the 1990s and the decades ahead” (p. 228). For these reasons, Capeverdean people who want to work or study in English speaking countries must have good English fluency. Consequently, teachers should test learner’s speaking ability so that they can help them develop their fluency in the target language and be able to communicate freely in any situation.

Indeed, some authors Byrne (1976), Doff (1988) pointed that the development of oral ability is a good source of motivation for most learners. Therefore, teachers have to find ways of demonstrating to the learners that they are making progress in the language all the time so that they can see by themselves how much language they can use. By demonstrating to learners that they are developing their oral proficiency in the target language, they feel more motivated and engaged in the learning process. “It helps demonstrate to learners that they are making progress in their linguistic development, which can boost motivation. This encourages students to do more...” (Shebang, 17). Thus, if we wish students to speak English spontaneously we must give them opportunities to acquire confidence in their ability to speak. However, if we do not give them the chance to speak English, how will they ever be confident enough to use it in the real world? Hence, regular tests encourage them to take their learning seriously and regard speaking as a particularly important skill.

To summarize, although the assessment of learners’ oral performance is a hard task, it is of crucial importance to test speaking for several reasons. In general, the assessment of the speaking skills provides information about learners’ oral fluency in the target language and it is a great source of motivation for most learners. Specifically for Cape Verde, the English language is very important because for a tourist-based economy country. English is crucial as an international language and Cape Verde is emerging as part of the international economy. It also gives our students more opportunities to attend universities in English speaking countries and facilitate their integration into English speaking societies.

2.6 Difficulties of Testing Speaking

Now that the importance of testing English language skills in the Cape Verdean classroom has been established, an examination of common difficulties in the testing of oral language skills will be conducted in order to understand which difficulties Cape Verdean teachers face specifically, we need to understand the general types of constraints most teachers face in the field.

Speaking is probably the most difficult skill to test because there are some constraints involved in the assessment of this skill. Indeed, Madsen (1983) states that “ the testing of speaking is widely regarded as the most challenging of all language exams to prepare, administer and score” (p. 147). This means that the assessment of the spoken language has been a problem for English teachers because there are some constraints involved in the assessment of speaking skill and the speaking tests are difficult to deal with. Therefore, according to an online source, the difficulties involved in the assessment of these skills frequently lead teachers into using inadequate oral tests or even not testing speaking skills at all (Assessing Speaking Skills, p. 2).

Underhill (1987) claims that when assessing students speaking skills, teachers should ask themselves: What should I look for when I assess a student’s ability to speak English? He added that some of the difficulties that teachers face in the assessment of speaking are due to the fact that oral tests are often more difficult to design, administer and mark (p.3). “Teachers often feel much less secure when dealing with tests which measure speaking and listening even though these skills are regarded as essential components of a diagnostic test which measures overall linguistic proficiency” (Hingle and Linington, p.26). That is to say, although teachers recognize the importance of the speaking and listening skills, they do not assess neither speaking nor listening since they do not feel confident in dealing with these kinds of tests.

According to Heaton (1975) one difficulty in testing speaking is to separate the listening skill from the speaking skill. He adds that in many tests of oral production, it is neither possible nor desirable to separate the speaking skills from listening skills. In normal situations, there is an

interchange between the speaking skill and the listening skill. It is impossible to hold a conversation without understanding what is being said and without making one understood at the same time. Therefore, this interdependence of the speaking and listening skills increases the difficulty of any attempt to evaluate accurately what is being tested. (p.88). This means that the interdependence between the two skills becomes a factor in testing speaking and it is not easy to identify whether we are testing speaking or speaking and listening together.

In addition, Heaton (1975) claims that testing speaking is a particular problem when it is necessary to test large numbers of students. Even if each student speaks for only a few minutes, this becomes a huge job because of the limited time involved. That is to say, dealing with the issue of testing speaking in large classes is an enormous problem of time consumption since each student must be tested in turn. (p.88). Omaggio (1993) is of the same opinion. He states that, “many classroom teachers feel that oral exams are among the most difficult types of exams to create, schedule, administer and grade, especially when they have large classes or many classes in the course of a day. For these reasons some classroom teachers consider oral tests impractical and do not attempt to test oral skills in any regular or consistent fashion” (p.454). The issue of large class is the main concern of most Capeverdean language teachers because in Cape Verde the average number of students per class is 40.

Another difficult task regarding oral testing is the test score. The scoring of an oral test is a complex task since it requires subjective judgements on the part of the marker. On contrary, objective tests are easier to score because they do not require subjective judgement on the part of the marker. Since they have only one correct answer, they can be scored mechanically. Thus, they produce consistent results. On the other hand, “subjective tests do not always have high reliability” (Underhill, 1987, p.88). Reliability will be discussed later in this paper.

According to Heaton (1975) subjective tests are difficult to score because the “responses can be whatever students wish to say. Some answers will be better than others, thus perhaps causing a problem in the scoring of the items” (p. 25). He also stated that when scoring students' oral performance, the examiner should concentrate on how students are using the language to achieve their purpose. “The errors that interfere in communication should be penalized, but the errors that do not interfere in the meaning are not penalized in the same way. Nevertheless, purpose should be clear for both testee and tester” (p.90). This means that teachers should be clear about what they intend to measure in an oral exam (fluency, grammar, pronunciation,

appropriateness and so on). Thus, scoring an oral test is a difficult task.

However, according to Madsen (1983), there are ways to simplify the scoring. He says that the most successful way is a system of objectified scores for nearly every utterance or response the testee makes. This procedure attempt to identify specific points in the testee's speech such as appropriateness, fluency, grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. The advantage of this procedure is that it can be used by teachers with little specialized training and by well- trained teachers. Thus, it is easy to use.

In addition, besides the specific scoring procedure, a holistic grading can also be used to evaluate the testee' entire speech simultaneously. Thus, the scoring system that we choose tends to depend on how well trained we are to evaluate oral communication and what we choose to evaluate.

The advantage of using the holistic grading is that it concentrates on communication and tends to be selected when teachers evaluate a variety of criteria simultaneously. And the limitation is that many untrained teachers find it confusing to evaluate many things at the same time. Another suggestion made by Madsen is to score the speaking test immediately if possible. (p. 167). Teachers can Also use a checklist (see appendix 5) "you can mark the appropriate level to indicate how each student rates on the skill or language competencies you are considering at that moment" (Larson, 1992, p. 207).

In short, the scoring of oral exams is a complex task because it requires subjective judgement on the part of the marker. However, some authors claim that there are procedures that can help teachers in the scoring of oral tests. They need to be trained in order to understand the scoring procedures. Well-trained teachers feel more comfortable when dealing with oral scoring procedures while untrained teachers find such procedures confusing and do not feel confident in using them.

It is not easy to test speaking because of the constraints involved in such process. However, "a speaking test can be a source of beneficial backwash. If speaking is tested, unless it is tested at a very low level, such as reading aloud, this encourages the teaching of speaking in classes" (Assessing Speaking Skills, n.p.). Therefore, we should identify common constraints in Capeverdean context and work on ways of showing those problems. That is the project of this paper. This section was concerned with the difficulties involved in the assessment of speaking. Now it is indispensable to talk about kind of tests that can be used according to the information

we want to obtain.

2.7. Kinds of test

Tests are categorized according to their suitability and purpose. Thus, it is important to make a distinction between the kinds of tests that teachers can use according to their aims. According to Underhill (1987), “giving a test is like asking a question- it is a request for information. If you ask the right sort of question, you will get the right sort of answer. If you ask a silly question, you get a silly answer. In order to develop a test, you have to know what kind of information you want” (p.12). Hughes (1989) states that, “We use tests to obtain information. The information that we hope to obtain will of course vary from situation to situation. It is possible, nevertheless, to categorize test according to a small number of kinds of information being sought. This categorization will prove useful both in deciding whether an existing test is suitable for a particular purpose and in writing appropriate new tests where these are necessary” (p.9). Teachers can choose a kind of test taking into account the purpose of the test and the situation in which it will be applied. According to Hughes, a test that proves ideal for one purpose may be useless for another. The four kinds of tests claimed by authors such as Harrison, (1983) Heaton, (1975) Hughes, (1989) and Underhill (1987) are:

2.7.1. Proficiency tests. By applying a proficiency test, teachers can gather information about learners’ general level of language ability. According to Omaggio (1993), proficiency tests measure the language ability of individuals at a given point in time without regard to a specific course of instruction. Omaggio cites Dondonoli (1987) who pointed out that proficiency tests are appropriate for measuring general progress in the acquisition of language skills (p. 228). Hughes (1989) agrees that “proficiency tests are designed to measure people’s ability in a language regardless of any training they may have had in that language” (p.9). Therefore, the content of a proficiency test is based on a specification of what testees have to be able to do in the language in order to be considered proficient.

2.7.2 Placement tests. These tests Are designed to place learners into learning groups so that they can start a course at approximately the same level as the other students in the class. As Hughes (1989) states, “ placement tests as their names suggests, are intended to provide information which will help to place students at the stage of the teaching programme most appropriate for their ability” (p. 14). They are typically used to assign students to classes at different levels. Harrison (1983) claims that placement tests are concerned with student’s “present standing, and so relates to general ability rather than specific- point of learning” (p. 4). He also argues that, as a rule, the results of the tests are needed quickly so that teaching may begin.

2.7.3. Diagnostic tests enable teachers to identify specific weaknesses / difficulties so that an appropriate remedial programme can be planned. Harrison (1983) claims that, “a diagnostic test (sometimes called a formative or progress test) checks on students’ progress in learning a particular element of the course. It is used, for example, at the end of a unit in the course-book or after a lesson designed to teach one particular point” (p. 6). Diagnostic tests can provide information about the progress, which may be used systematically for remedial work. “The diagnostic test tries to answer the question: how well have the students learnt this particular material?” (Harrison, 1983, p.6). Thus, diagnostic tests seek to discover areas of weakness in a particular learner or group of learners.

2.7.4 Achievement tests. Achievement tests show teachers what learners have learnt from a particular course. Thus, the main purpose of an achievement test is to show mastery of a particular syllabus. They are designed to measure how successful learners have been in achieving objectives. According to Harrison (1983) Achievement tests “look back over a long period of learning” (p.7). Hughes (1989) points out that they are of two kinds: **final achievement** and **progress achievement** tests. Final achievement tests are those administered at the end of a course. They may be written and administered by Ministries of Education or by members of teaching institutions. Progress achievement tests are intended to measure the progress learners make in mastering material taught in the classroom. (10). According to Omaggio (1993) achievement tests are used to evaluate students’ acquisition of certain specified course content, generally for diagnostic purposes. “A valid achievement test will only test materials that have

been covered during the course of instruction” (p. 412). This paper is more concerned with achievement tests because they are the kind of tests that are primarily used in Capeverdean classrooms to test and give final grades. We have outlined the kinds of tests that teachers can use according to their purpose. Now our focus is on the features of a good oral test.

2.8. Features of a good oral test.

One of the primary challenges teachers face in designing a test is to include the features of a good test, especially with oral tests. Therefore, before we can identify and analyze the challenges teachers face when designing a test, we must understand what constitutes a good test.

It is essential to highlight the importance of the concepts of validity, reliability and practicality when designing tests especially, oral tests. You will never write a good test if you disregard the importance of these concepts. This means that in order to design a good test, teachers have to take into account the importance of these concepts and have a clear understanding of their meaning.

2.8.1 Validity

The concept of validity is concerned whether a test measures what it is intended to measure. Indeed, Hughes (1989) claims that, “too often tests fail to measure accurately whatever it is they are intended to measure. He argues that there are two main sources of inaccuracy. The first source concerns test content and techniques. He stated the following situation, “if we want to know how well someone can write, there is absolutely no way we can get a really accurate measure of their ability by means of a multiple choice test” (p.2). in other words, a writing test should involve learners in writing composition, letters or instructions. Thus, to be valid, a test must provide accurate measurements by using appropriate techniques and by measuring what is

relevant and important. Davies (1990) claims that, "Validity concerns- in different ways-being able to say: 'yes, this is a good test in this context and for this purpose'" (p. 14).

With regard to validity Harrison (1983) points out that, "there are many different kinds of validity, but only two are vital for a teacher setting his own tests: **content validity** and **face validity**" (p.11). According to Hughes (1989), a test is said to have content validity if its content constitutes a representative sample of the language skills and structures, with which it is meant to be concerned (p.22). To put it another way, content validity is concerned with what goes on the test. The content of a test should be decided and organized in such a way as to ensure that the test covers all the areas to be assessed. Content validity is of great importance because the accuracy of a test depends on its content validity. A test, which lacks content validity, is likely to have a harmful backwash effect. Thus, teachers must ensure that the test would have a positive backwash effect by testing relevant knowledge or ability. As Hughes says that, "too often the content of tests is determined by what is easy to test rather than what is important to test" (p. 23). Content validity is very important because the greater a test content validity is the more it is an accurate measure of what it is intended to measure.

On the other hand, face validity is concerned with what teachers and students think of the test based on how it appears when they quickly look at it. This means that the test should look as though it is testing what it is supposed to measure. "Does it look like a reasonable test? Do the people who use the test think it's a good test? If either the tester or the testees are unhappy with it, then it won't yield good results" (Underhill, 1987, p.105). According to Hughes (1989), a test that does not have face validity, may not be accepted by testees, teachers, education authorities or employers. (p.27). One idea suggested by him is to give the test to a colleague or several colleagues, to see if they can understand how to do the test and to see if they produce unpredicted responses or interpretation. That is to say that, a valid measurement of oral performance should present testees with tasks that require them to speak. Otherwise, teachers will get an inaccurate measurement of the speaking ability.

2.8.2 Reliability

The concept of reliability is particularly important when considering communicative language testing. “Reliability is a necessary characteristic of any good test: for it to be valid at all, a test must first be reliable as a measuring instrument” (Heaton, 1975, p. 162). It is concerned with the extent to which we can depend on the test results (Weir, 1990, p. 24). A test is reliable if it produces consistent results at different times. Thus, the reliability of a test is its consistency, that is, it should produce the same or almost the same results in different occasions. Hughes (1989) states that “on a reliable test you can be confident that someone will get more or less the same score, whether they happen to take it on one particular day or on the next” (p.3). This means that with a reliable test, the result must be consistent, in different situations, no matter when the test is taken, while with an unreliable test, the result is likely to be different, depending on the day or situation in which it is taken. According to Heaton (1975), one way of measuring the reliability of a test is to re-administer the same test after a lapse of time. According to Hughes (1989), in order to make tests more reliable, teachers should provide clear and explicit instructions because if the instructions are not clear testees can misinterpret what they are asked to do, mostly the weakest students. Thus, a good test should also be reliable, which means that it should produce consistent results at different times. (p.36). This means that the concept of reliability is of extreme importance when considering oral testing because it is concerned with the test results. Thus, oral tests are not easy to mark with reliability. We can find the same test scored by different markers with a great discrepancy between the grades. Therefore, the result of a test depends on its reliability. For example, in a reliable test, the grades should be the same or almost the same even though, two or more different examiners or the same examiner marks it on different occasions.

2.8.3 Practicality

The third characteristic of a good test is practicality. “The practicality of a test refers to the degree to which it is cost effective and easy to administer” (Assessing Oral Skills in EFL Contexts, p.1). This means that practicality is concerned with aspects that are practical in a test

situation. A test is said to be impractical if it is too expensive for students and the school. Also if a test takes the teacher too long to score it, it is not practical. According to an online article written by Beale, entitled 'Language testing and method of assessment', the number of testees, the time constraints for testing and marking, and the available human and physical resources all need to be considered carefully before an assessment scheme is chosen (p. 8). Therefore, teachers should check how practical a test is before administering it.

Underhill (1987) states that teachers should ask people what they think of the content and design of the test; particularly the ones who use it such as the learners, the teachers, the administrators, and people who make decisions based on the results. It is important to give the test to a colleague or several colleagues in order to see if they can understand how to do the test. Other people may see ambiguities where we see only one possible interpretation. Practicality is one of the greatest factor in oral tests. It involves a series of factors that need to be considered before any assessment method is chosen. Thus, a good test should be practical. It should respect the length of time available for testees to perform the task. Moreover, its scoring should be practical too.

In short, any language test efficiently constructed should exactly meet the principles of validity, reliability and practicality. Validity and reliability cannot be separated since, to be valid a test has to be reliable beforehand. Thus, an efficient oral test is not a disorganized selection of tasks. Every situation presents a set of demands that need to be addressed before designing the test. In the previous section, we discussed some characteristics of a good test, that is, concepts that teachers should keep in mind when designing oral tests. Now the focus is on types of oral tests that can be used to assess the speaking skills.

2.9 Types of oral tests.

What is an oral test? According to Underhill (1987), "an oral test is a repeatable procedure in which a learner speaks, and is assessed on the basis of what he says. It can be used alone or combined with tests of other skills" (p.7). Thus, oral tests are intended to measure how the testees are able to use language in real-life situations.

According to Doff (1988), there are two main ways of testing students' speaking ability: by continuous assessment throughout the year, and by giving short oral test to each student. In continuous assessment, the teacher can give a mark for general ability to speak in all lessons or mark certain activities done in class. Nevertheless, the teacher should tell students that they are being given marks for speaking. On the other hand, in short oral tests, the teacher gives the whole class a set of topics to prepare a few weeks before the test. Then, over two or three lessons, the teacher calls each student in turn and tests them on one of the topics. Each student test lasts 30-60 seconds and they do not know which topic they will be asked to talk about (p. 266).

Another important point is that, if learners are going to be tested over communicative tasks, it is necessary that they are prepared for that kind of test, that is, that the course materials cover the sorts of tasks they are being asked to perform. This means that we cannot expect testees to perform correctly on functions that they have not been practiced in classroom. For example, if students have been discussing family or peer relationship, they will feel more comfortable if they are tested on similar topics. (Larson, 1992, p. 205). Likewise, Omaggio (1983), also agrees that, "classroom tests should not present students with tasks that are significantly different from those with which they are familiar, and questions or activities designed around authentic materials should elicit the same kind of performance that students have practiced in classroom" (p. 452). Therefore, "when a speaker is speaking about something which he feels confident about, he may speak more fluently than when he is rather uncertain or he finds what he is saying difficult to express" (Puhl, 1997, p. 2). Another factor outlined by Omaggio is that, tests lasting more than fifteen minutes might be administered outside of class in the instructor's office, or students can be tested individually or in small groups during class while other students work on small group activities (p. 455). Testees can succeed in their oral examination if teachers make a careful selection of the techniques and be aware of what they are going to assess.

Regarding continuous assessment, Underhill (1987), believes that the teacher is the person who has had the most experience of learners' speaking ability in the foreign language. Thus, instead of being based on a ten – minute test, a teacher assessment should be based on "fifty or a hundred hours' exposure to the learner's language" (p.27). He added that the teacher's judgment is formed as a gradual process rather than a sudden decision. This could be a great way of assessing learners' oral performance because for many learners the test situation creates anxiety, they get so nervous and even fluent speakers' performance may be affected.

There are many techniques suggested by Underhill (1987) Heaton (1975) and Madsen (1983) that can be used to measure testees' oral performance.

2.10 Conversational Exchange

This is a simple type of oral test in which learners are given a particular situation and instructed to respond in a certain way. Below are types of conversational exchange:

2.10.1 Conversational Exchange: type 1

In this type of test students are asked to construct a sentence following a certain pattern using the information previously given to them. They are given two or three examples first.

Example: Tania has a bicycle. Her friend Risa has a "Starlet", so Tania would like to have a Starlet. Answer required by students (She wants to buy a Starlet).

Example: Carmen is married. Her sister Telma is not married and she would like to marry. Answer required by students (She wants to get married).

2.10.2 Conversational Exchange: Type 2

Here a situation is given to the testee and they can respond freely because no guidance is given.

For example: a friend of yours has a car. He is going to Plateau. You are at the bus stop waiting for the bus to go to Plateau too and you see your friend in his car close to the bus stop. What would you tell him? Can you please give me a lift?

You have been served a coffee in a bar, but you have not been given sugar, and you would like some. What do you say to the server? Could I have some sugar, please?

2.10.3 Conversational Exchange: Type 3

In this type of test, the testee is given a stimulus sentence and can respond in any appropriate way. This type of test usually depends on conventional responses, such as responses to requests and invitations. For example:

A. Maria: Janine, would you like to come to my birthday party tomorrow?

B. Janine: Yes, thank you/ I'm sorry I cannot.

B. Pedro: Can I borrow your pen?

João: Sure, go ahead. / Sorry, I'm using it.

2.10.4. Conversational Exchange: Type 4

This is similar to type 3, but this may be done as part of a longer dialogue. Example:

Speaker A: Somebody told me that our friend Karine gave birth yesterday. Is it true?

Student: Yes, it is true.

Speaker A: Oh nice! What about the baby?

Student: She is a cute girl.

Speaker A: It is great! Tell Karine I will visit her soon. Bye.

2.10.5. Conversational Exchange: Type 5

This type is similar to the previous one. It also takes the form of an incomplete dialogue, but here the teacher gives testees some clues they have to follow to respond. Example: you are in Plateau and a woman from Sao Vicente asks you:

Woman: Excuse me; do you know where “Hipper Compra” supermarket is?

Student: It is in Palmarejo.

Woman: How can I get there? (Tell her to take the bus number 10 and where to stop)

Student: You should take the bus number 10 and ask the driver to tell you where to stop.

2.11. Oral Interviews

Another important technique for assessing students speaking ability is through an oral interview. Brown and Yule (1983) state that “oral interview is the most widely used form of assessment of spoken language abilities at the present time, it clearly has proved to be a useful tool in what is still generally considered a problem area of assessment” (p. 103). In this type of

test, the tester and the testee carry on a conversation. The tester has a list of questions to ask the testee, and the interviewer or another person assesses the language proficiency of the testee

In addition, the interviewer should avoid talking too much. He should speak clearly, not interrupt the interviewee to give answers, and maintain eye contact with the interviewee and not correct the interviewee during the interview. The interview should be scored only after the testee has left the room. It is also important to remember that when assessing student's performance through an oral interview, teachers must take into account that its score is highly subjective. This means that two teachers may give different marks to the same testee. It depends on the criteria chosen. Therefore, the teacher might establish the criteria beforehand.

Although the oral interview is a useful technique for assessing speaking, there are controversial opinions about this technique. On the one hand, there are people who claim that it is a realistic means of assessing speaking in a natural speech situation. On the other hand, some claim that the examination is artificial and unrealistic. Heaton (1975, p. 97) has said that students are not placed in natural real life speech situation, but in examination situation. So they may have psychological tension and constraints. Heaton (1975, p. 97).

This technique has some advantages. Firstly, "it measures oral skills by having the testee actually speak". Secondly, it not only assesses pronunciation and grammar, but also vocabulary and language fluency. Thirdly, it is the most common and authentic type of oral test and it is less controlled than other techniques. It can also be used to find how well the testee can structure a short narrative, and to what degree they can express more complex points of view (Turner, 1998, p.194).

2.12. Testing speaking using visual material

Pictures, maps, diagrams, and other types of visual materials can be used to test speaking without requiring the testee to comprehend written or spoken materials. Various types of material are appropriate for this type of test, depending on the language the tester wants to obtain. According to Heaton (1975), pictures can be used to test testee oral performance in the classroom. Testees can use pictures to make descriptions, a narrations or a discussions.

According to Heaton the selection of the pictures used for the test is important since it will help in controlling the vocabulary required and may determine the type of sentence structure that predominates. (p. 93) there are several ways of assessing speaking using pictures:

Example 1:

Testees are given a picture to study for a few minutes, and then they are required to describe it

Example 2:

Testees are given a series of pictures and they have to make a narration of what happens. The examiner has to give them one or two sentences as a model.

Example 3:

The tester and testee have 4/5 pictures in front of them. Each picture differs only in one or two aspects from the others. Testees are given letters (a, b, c...) and the tester cannot see the letters. Testees describe the picture according to the letter given. Then the examiner selects the picture according to testees' description. (See appendices II and III)

Example 4:

The examiner gives similar pictures to the testees. They have to describe their own picture without showing it to their partner. After the description, they will discuss in which way the pictures differ. (See Appendices I, II, and III). **PLEASE NOTE:** Testees can do this in pairs or in-group, according to the tester's purpose.

Example 5:

Testees are given a sequence of pictures, they have to describe their own picture and then discuss the relation of those pictures. After the discussion, they decide which picture comes first, second, and so on. (see appendices I, II and III).

2.13. Discussion/Conversation

This technique consists of having the testee and the tester to carry on a conversation. According to Underhill (1987), two people having a conversation on a topic of common interest is the most natural thing in the world. He states that in this technique, the topics discussed and the

directions taken by the conversation are the result of the interaction between the two people involved in the conversation. One rule for the examiner is not to talk too much, he should leave short spaces or longer silences for the testee to decide what to say or to think of the words he/ she can use to hold the conversation. (p. 45-46).

2.14. Role-play

This is another useful technique used to assess learners speaking ability. The learner is asked to take on a particular role and to imagine himself in that role in a particular situation. Then he is evaluated in his ability to carry out the task in the role-play. It can focus on a variety of different language function. This is especially useful for the assessment of specific work- related to oral performance. It is a better indicator of real life performance than the interview format (Weir, 1988, p.88) Kelner (1993), cited by Shaaban (2001) believes that role-play can be “an enjoyable way of informal assessment that could be used effectively within a content-based curriculum” (p.19). He claims that this technique combines oral performance and physical activity. Students have the chance to use English as if they were communicating in real life situations. As Byrne says, role-play is a “way of taking the students out of the classroom for a while and showing them how English can be useful to them in certain situations” (1987: 39).

According to Byrne this technique is important for three main reasons: Firstly, students are free to use their general knowledge of English to express themselves. The second reason is that the kind of language the students are asked to use in the classroom (when they are performing) is similar to the one they may eventually need in similar situations outside the classroom. The third reason is that role-play increase students’ motivation to speak the language Below is an example of a role –play

**Imagine that you are a salesperson trying to convince a housewife to buy a product.
Invent the name of the product.**

Here are some expressions you can use

To persuade

I think you should...

Why not try

If I were you...

To refuse an offer

Sorry, but I...I do not think I need...

I have already tried... and

2.15. Oral report

Oral reports consist of having the testee prepare an oral presentation lasting from five to ten minutes. The testee is expected to refer to notes, but reading aloud is strongly discouraged. Presentation is an authentic activity for the learners. In formal test procedure, the learner makes the presentation directly to the interviewer. In a less informal situation, mini-presentations may be a routine part of the daily teaching schedule and be used for testing purposes at the same time. It is important to choose a topic that is relevant to the testees. They will feel more confident talking about a topic that they already know well. Therefore, the topic should be chosen by the testees and in consultation with their teacher. Presentation is an authentic activity for learners since it involves different functional skills such as expressing opinions or arguments, dealing with questions, summarizing and so on. The teacher can identify weaknesses that need further practice. (Underhill, 1987, p.47).

2.16. Re-tell story

This kind of test consists of telling students a story and asking them to retell the same story in their own words. Also the learner can read a short passage to himself before being asked to re-tell it immediately afterwards. According to Underhill (1987) there is no fixed time limit on

the reading stage, but he/ she is not allowed to refer back to the written text once he/she has begun to re-telling the story or text. Thus, the learner is given the text to read at the beginning of this stage of the test, and the interviewer takes the text back once the learner says he/she has finished reading it. Underhill also stated that this technique can be used at all levels. "At lower levels, it may be necessary to offer help with vocabulary and to check understanding" (p. 73).

Larson (1992) claims that Story retelling activities provide a useful vehicle for determining a student's understanding of a story or situation as well as his or her ability to synthesize or paraphrase it. (p. 206). It is important that when designing a story retelling activity," be sure to select stories that are appropriate to the age and grade level of your students and which will spark their interest" (Yule, 1983, p. 131).

2.17. Questions and Answers

This test consists of a series of disconnected questions, "which are graded, in order of increasing difficulty. Starting with simple questions such as: 'what's your name?' 'Where do you live?' to more complex sentences" (Littlewood, 1981, p. 103). A good way to start can be to ask a direct question about the testees' opinion of their level of english: " How well can you speak English?" this can be the quicker test ever; if a person can answer that question well, at some length , he can speak well. Learners should know how long they have to answer and are explicitly encouraged to keep speaking for the full amount of time (Underhill, 1987, p. 61).

2.18. Reading blank dialogues

In this kind of test, the learner is given a dialogue with only one part written. He has a few minutes in which to read it and prepare the missing lines. The examiner reads the dialogue, and the testee fills in blanks aloud. According to Underhill (1987), "This technique is useful for

getting the learner to ask questions. The length of preparation time depends on the difficulty of the task. If the general meaning of the missing sentences is easy to identify, there is an argument for keeping the preparation time short: the assessor wants to know not only whether the learner can work out something suitable to say from the surrounding context, but also, authentically, how quickly he can do it” (p. 65).

Below is an example of a blank dialogue:

Helping a foreign visitor

Peter is an English-speaking tourist in Cape Verde and he wants to change some money.

Jair is a Capeverdean citizen

Peter: Excuse me, do you speak English?

Jair:

Peter: I am looking for a bank.

Jair:.....

Peter: Thank you very much. That is very kind of you.

Jair:

Peter: Your English is very good.

Jair?

Peter: No, I ‘m here for a business meeting.

Jair

To summary, throughout this literature review, we have discussed many important issues concerning speaking assessment. We started with the concepts of testing in general and testing speaking specifically. Testing is an indispensable part of teaching because through assessment, teachers can check learners’ progress and perceive the effectiveness of a course curriculum. Testing speaking deals with the assessment of learners’ oral performance in the language. Thus, testing influences teaching and learning and this influence is known as backwash effect, which can be harmful or beneficial.

It is important to test speaking because it encourages students to speak English in the classroom. However, some constraints complicate the assessment of the speaking skills. Although speaking is a difficult skill to assess, a speaking test is a great source of motivation for most learners. Thus, it is essential to test speaking because of its positive backwash effect.

However, in order to design valid, reliable and practical oral tests there are some concepts that the test designer should keep in mind and be aware of their significance. Therefore, with this in mind, a field research will be conducted in order to identify the constraints that complicate the assessment of the speaking skills in Capeverdean EFL classrooms. In addition, based on the constraints Capeverdean teachers face, suggestions will be proposed to assist teachers in the implementation of speaking tests in Capeverdean classrooms.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to answer the question, “What are the constraints in Cape Verdean EFL Classrooms that complicate the assessment of speaking?” I designed the following research to identify the constraints of testing and to be able to offer suggestions on how to address those constraints.

Based on the literature review, I designed a questionnaire about speaking assessment. The questionnaire has four sections and each of them has an objective.

The first section consists of a question concerning speaking assessment in which English teachers have to point out if they assess their students’ speaking ability. They have two options: yes or no. If they select yes, they are required to describe the kind of oral tests they use to assess speaking in their classrooms. The objective of this section is to find out if Capeverdean English teachers test the speaking skills of their students and the kinds of oral test used. The description of the oral tests is an open-ended question. I chose an open-ended question because I wanted teachers to produce the types of tests they use and to describe how they use them. This will give me the opportunity to analyze their testing methods. Also, if I gave them options, they might choose testing method even if they did not use those methods.

The second section of the questionnaire consists of four items concerning the constraints that Capeverdeans English teachers face in administering speaking tests. Underhill (1987), Hughes (1989), Heaton (1975) and Madsen (1983) identified these four constraints in the literature review as the most common difficulties of speaking assessment. They state that tests are difficult to design; difficult to mark; difficult to administer in large classes and difficult to separate the listening skills from the speaking skills.

The teachers have to choose the option(s) that they face when administering speaking tests. Teachers can check more than one option if necessary. This section has the objective of

identifying the causes that teachers may not test speaking.

The third section has one question, which asked English teachers' opinion about the assessment of the four macro- skills in order of importance (very important, important, and not important). The objective of this section is to determine the importance of these skills to teachers relative to one another. Since researchers claim that, the assessment of speaking has been neglected in relation to the other skills; I wanted to know if the testing practices reflect their opinion of importance. If teachers think testing speaking is as important as the other skills, but do not test it, then there must be a reason.

Finally, the fourth section consists of a question concerning the influence of testing on speaking. It asks teachers whether they think the assessment of oral ability encourages students to speak English in the classroom. It presents three options: yes, no and I do not know. The objective of this question is to examine whether English teachers believe the assessment of speaking encourages learners to speak English as claimed by Doff (1988) and other researchers.

There was only one open-ended question on the questionnaire because many teachers refuse to respond to questionnaires with open-ended questions. They use to claim that they do not have time. (This questionnaire is in the appendices of this paper for further reference).

The survey was distributed to 45 teachers at 2nd and 3rd cycles in all the 8 secondary schools in Praia city. I chose 2nd and 3rd cycles teachers because at third cycle, students have covered the majority of grammar function and therefore, they have a certain amount of knowledge that allows them to produce language. At this level learners are more able to communicate in English in the classroom. They need chances to express their feelings and opinions about certain topics. On the other hand, I also chose second cycle because I believe that although students have not covered all the grammar functions yet, they have enough knowledge that allows them to speak English. At this level, it is very good for them to use the language in order to develop their speaking skills.

During the research, I faced some difficulties that were related to communication. It was very difficult to get the surveys back since I had to run behind teachers from morning to afternoon and sometimes without any positive result. Some teachers simply refused to respond it with the excuse that they did not have time. Thus, as stated above I spent entire days going back and forth from one school to another trying to convince teachers to respond to the questionnaire at that moment, but sometimes it was impossible. Many times, I felt exhausted, but never discouraged. I did my best in order to carry out the research. In fact, I got back 30 surveys from

the 45 that I distributed to English teachers in Praia.

This chapter presented the methodology of the field research. The next chapter deals with the presentation and analysis of the survey's results.

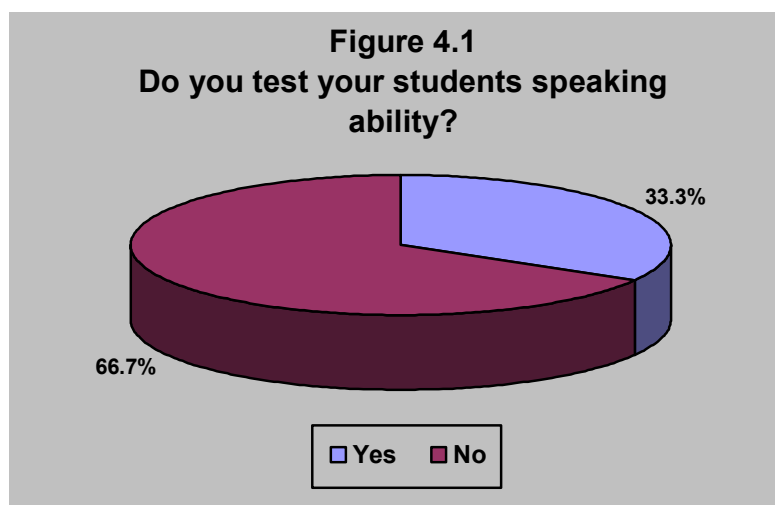
IV. RESULTS & ANALYSIS OF THE FIELD RESEARCH

4.1 Results of the Field Research

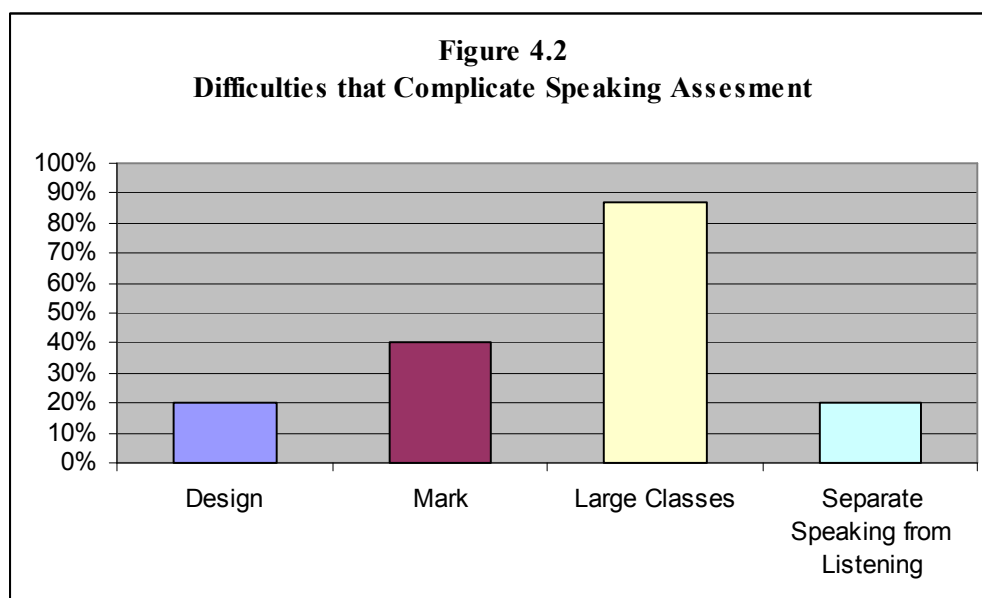
This chapter deals with the presentation and analysis of the survey's results. As stated in chapter three, the questionnaire was distributed to 45 English teachers at 2nd and 3rd cycles in all the eight secondary schools in Praia city. Of the 45 participants, 30 responded to the questionnaire and 15 did not respond. The results of the questionnaire are presented section by section as follow:

The first question asked English teachers if they test their students speaking ability. Of the 30 teachers who responded to the questionnaire, 10 or 33, 3% responded yes and 20 or 66, 7% responded no. Of the 10 teachers who test speaking, 8 (80%) stated that they use reading aloud and questions and answers to test speaking. And 2 (20%) of the teachers did not explain the type of oral tests used.

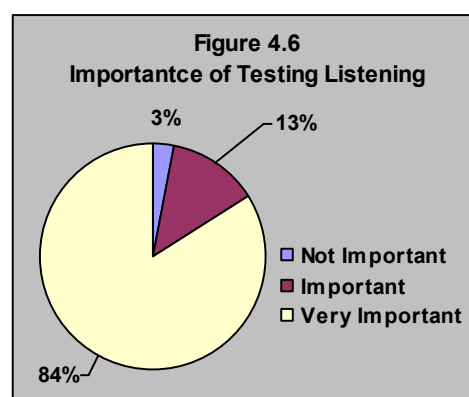
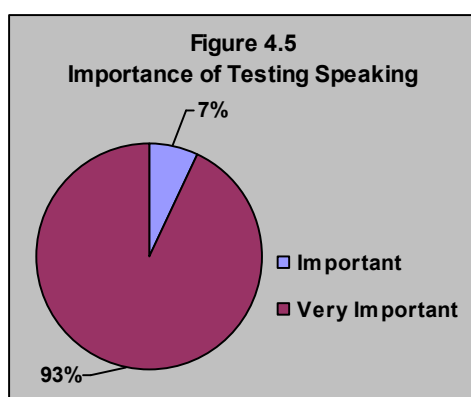
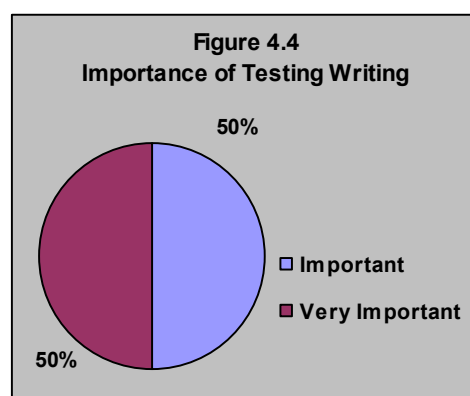
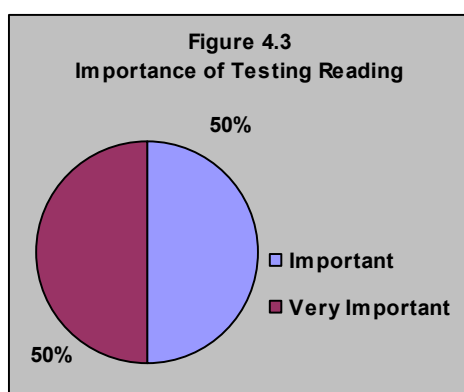
The responses of the teachers to this question are presented in figure 4.1. This question clearly demonstrates that the majority of English teachers in Praia do not test the speaking skill. This result agrees with the authors discussed in this paper who claim that the speaking skill is under-tested.



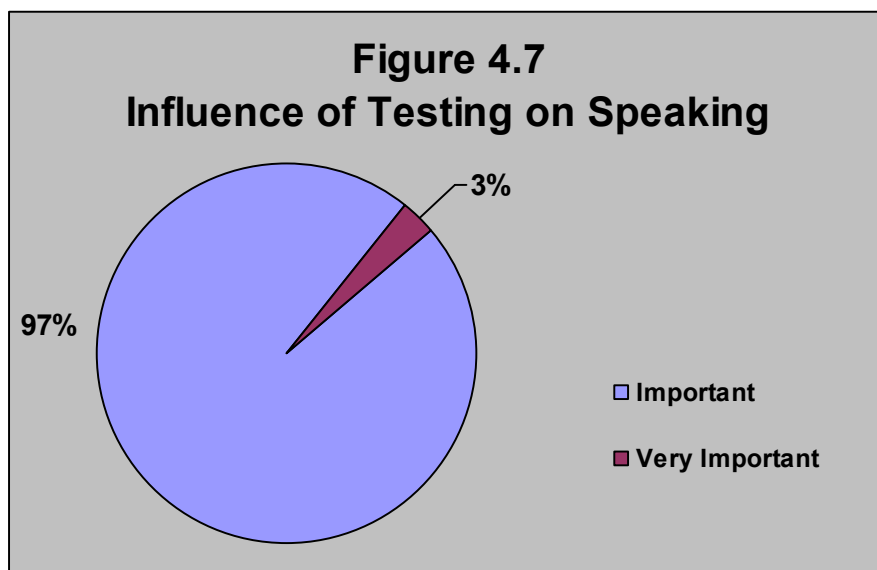
Concerning the second question, about the constraints that affect speaking assessment, which presents four options, 6 or 20% of teachers selected tests are difficult to design. And 12 or 40% stated that tests are difficult to mark, while 26 or 87% of teachers indicated that it is difficult to tests large classes and 6 or 20% marked that it is difficult to separate the speaking skill from the listening skill. The results of the second section are presented below in figure 4.2. Large classes are clearly the most significant constraint encountered by capeverdean 2nd and 3rd cycles teachers in Praia.



The third question asked teachers' opinion about the importance of testing the four macro-skills. Of the 30 teachers who responded to the questionnaire, 15 or 50% responded that it is important to test reading and 15 or 50% responded that it is very important. (see figure 4.3 below). Similar to the reading skill, 15 or 50% of the respondents stated that the writing skill is important to test and 15 or 50% responded that it is very important (see Figure 4.4 below). Concerning the speaking skill, 28 or 93,3 of the participants selected very important and 2 or 6,7% selected important. The teachers' responses are presented in the Figure 4.5. And finally, 25 or 83,3% of teachers found the listening skill to be very important, while 4 or 13,3% selected important, and only 1 or 3,3% selected not important. These responses are recorded in Figure 4.6 below.



Regarding the fourth question which asked teachers whether they think the assessment of students' oral ability encourages them to speak English in the classroom, of the 30 participants 29 or 96,7% selected yes and 1 or 3,3% selected no. The responses are presented on the diagram that follows:



4.2 Analysis of the Field Research

The results of the research demonstrate that a high percentage of English teachers in Praia city do not assess speaking, while a small percentage claimed to test speaking. In addition, the majority of English teachers in Praia believe that it is very important to test speaking and are aware of its beneficial backwash. However, it is noticeable that only a few test their students' oral ability. From the results, we can notice that the most under tested skill is the one that a great percentage of teachers believe is very important to test. Indeed, it has the highest percentage compared with the testing of the other skills.

Now, we shall focus on the eight teachers who claimed to assess speaking using both reading aloud and questions and answers. These two categories of testing will be analysed separately for a better understanding.

Regarding the reading aloud technique, the eight teachers all made similar statements such

as, “I use reading aloud to test my students speaking” or “ I give students a text and then ask them to read it aloud”. These teachers may be using reading aloud as a valid technique to test oral ability. In fact, reading aloud is a good tool to assess students’ pronunciation, intonation and sentence stress patterns. However, if the purpose of the test is to assess students’ grammar, fluency or vocabulary they will not get an accurate measurement. This technique does not require the testee to speak. Thus, this is not a communicative test because nobody is talking to anybody else. Underhill (1987) supports this view, he claims that this technique is not authentic because we cannot communicate by reading conversation and we never read a written conversation aloud. “Nobody is saying anything new to anyone else” (p. 76). Thus, reading aloud is an invalid technique to test oral ability if the test intends to test testees on grammar, fluency, vocabulary and appropriateness.

Our focus now is on the question and answer technique that the eight teachers mentioned above use as well in order to assess speaking in the classroom. They all states something similar to the following, “Questions & answers, I use to give a text to my students to read and then ask them questions to respond to orally”.

It seems that these teachers are not making an appropriate use of this technique because according to Underhill (1987), this technique consists of a series of disconnected questions that are graded in order of difficulty. Students are being assessed on their reading comprehension in conjunction with their ability to express what they have read. He states that a good way to start can be to ask a direct question to the testee that is not related to a text and is not assessing another skill such as reading comprehension. The tester should simply begin a conversation by asking a simple question, such as how well they can speak English. In this way, testees can use their own words to respond. (p. 61). Thus, I can conclude that English teachers in Praia are using inadequate techniques and this may have a negative impact on learners’ performance. Therefore, this writer will provide them with some useful techniques that to test speaking in their classrooms.

There were two additional teachers that claimed to test oral ability. However, they did not explain the types of tests they used. Although they claimed to test speaking, it seems that they are unclear regarding techniques commonly used to assess speaking and may not assess speaking in an effective manner. If they were unable to describe what they do in class, they may, in fact, not have answered truthfully on the questionnaire. Whatever the reason for their lack of response,

teachers should be able to describe their testing methods.

We must now turn to the majority of teachers who claimed not to assess their students' speaking skill. From the results, we can notice that the amount of teachers, who responded no, is higher than the teachers who responded yes. This is because the speaking skill is difficult to test as claimed by some researchers and consequently, many teachers do not try to administer oral tests at all. Thus, the results showed that Cape Verde is not an exception, that is, like other English teachers all over the world, they face some difficulties regarding the assessment of the speaking skill. Thus, the results agree with the researchers discussed in this paper who claimed that the speaking skill is neglected and, therefore, less regard than the reading and writing skills. Now that we have confirmed that most Capeverdean teachers do not test the speaking skill, it is important to understand why.

The second question of the questionnaire is about the constraints that complicate speaking assessment. This section has four of the most common reason why teachers do not test speaking.

From the results in figure 4.2 we can notice that large classes and tests scoring are the major constraints encountered by 2nd and 3rd cycles English teachers in Praia. Large classes have the highest percentage(87%), while design and separating speaking from listening have the same results with 20% of the responses. Also a significant number of teachers (40%) believe that oral tests are difficult to mark. Some Researchers discussed previously in this paper agree that these are the main constraints faced by teachers concerning the assessment of the speaking skill. However, in our context testing large classes are the major concern of EFL teachers. In fact, a large percentage (87%) of English teachers indicated that it is difficult to test large classes. We should recognize that the concept of large class is one of the biggest challenges of Capeverdean teachers and the problem becomes bigger when dealing with speaking assessment. These results agree with some authors Underhill, (1987) Heaton, (1975) Jones (1977) who claim that it is difficult to test speaking in large classes. Thus, the study revealed the reasons why the majority of English teachers in Praia do not assess their students speaking ability. It is because the speaking skill is a complex skill to test because of the difficulties involved. Thus, the next chapter will give some recommendations of how teachers can address these constraints.

Regarding the importance of testing the four macro- skills, of the 30 teachers who responded to the questionnaire, 15 (50%) believe that it is very important to test reading and the same percentage indicated that it is important. Likewise, half of the teachers stated that it is very

important to test writing while the same percentage indicated that it is important. On the other hand, a large percentage (93%) of teachers claimed that it is very important to test speaking. And 7% believe that it is important. Finally, a high percentage (83, 3%) of teachers claimed that it is very important to test listening, while 13,3% believe that it is important and 3,3% think that it is not important to test listening. It is noticeable that speaking and listening are the most important skill to be tested according to Capeverdean English teachers in Praia. Indeed, from the results we can notice that speaking and listening have the highest results in relation to the other skills.

This is interesting because in real context, reading and writing are the most tested skills. Therefore, speaking and listening are the most neglected skills. This may result from the fact that reading and writing are easier to test in relation to listening and speaking skills. Indeed, many researchers state that teachers often feel secure when dealing with tests that measure speaking and listening even though these skills are regarded as essential. Thus, listening and speaking are two extremely important skills and the results reveals that it is very important to test both. However it is noticeable that Capeverdean teachers' acknowledge of the importance of testing speaking and yet it is neglected partly because of the difficulties involve in oral testing. This may indicate that they need tools, training or other recourses with testing speaking in order to obtain valid and reliable measurement of oral ability. This paper will provide some suggestions that will help teachers to overcome the constraints involved in speaking assessment.

With reference to the fourth question, which asked teachers whether they think the assessment of learners oral performance encourages them to speak in the classroom. Of the 30 teachers who responded to the questionnaire, a high percentage (96, 7%) of teachers responded yes, while only (3, 3%) indicated no. The results of this question surprised me because I was expecting teachers to answer no or I do not know since the majority do not assess speaking. The results revealed that although the majority of English teachers in Praia do not assess speaking, they are aware of its beneficial backwash effect. We can notice that of the 30 teachers who responded to the questionnaire, only 1 thinks that the assessment of oral performance does not motivate learners to speak English in the classroom. This means that teachers do not need to be convinced of the importance of testing speaking, but encouraged and given tools and training.

Many authors discussed in this work claim that if speaking is tested it encourages learners to understand the importance of practicing the target language in the classroom. Thus, the results of the survey agree with who claimed that the assessment of the speaking skill encourages

learners to speak English in the classroom.

To summary, the field research concluded that most of Capeverdean English teachers in Praia do not assess the speaking skill and the ones who claimed to do it are using invalid techniques. It also proved that the majority of English teachers in Praia recognize the importance of testing speaking and its beneficial backwash. Although teachers recognize the influence of testing on speaking, only a few teachers try to test speaking. The results of the study reveals that large classes are the main constraints in capeverdean context that complicate speaking assessment in EFL classrooms. the test score is another constraint encountered by English teachers at 2nd and 3rd cycles in Praia.

V. SUGGESTIONS & CONCLUSIONS

5. 1 suggestions

Throughout this work, the importance of testing the speaking skills as well as the difficulties involved in the assessment of this skill has been highlighted. Additionally, the field research revealed the constraints in Capeverdean EFL classrooms that complicate speaking assessment. Thus, based on the information from the literature review and the field research, I will make some suggestions, first to the Ministry of Education, then to English teachers in the field and finally suggestion for further research.

5.1.1 Suggestion to the Ministry of Education

First, I would suggest to the Ministry of Education to think about the need for Capeverdean students to be able to maintain a conversation in English after graduating from high school. Thus, the inclusion of oral tests in the national curriculum would change the perception of students and teachers about the importance of speaking the English language. Likewise, the Ministry of Education should provide teachers with assessment tools and training, as well as assistance or other recourses to support them in speaking assessment. The field research revealed that English teachers in Praia do not assess speaking not because they disregard its importance, but because they are not well prepared to deal with speaking assessment mostly because large classes are their main concern.

5.1.2 Suggestions for English teachers in the field

I would suggest for English teachers to keep in mind that oral testing is difficult, but possible. I would also suggest English teachers not to give up trying to assess speaking because it is of crucial importance for learners. In addition, they should test speaking because of its backwash effect. Also, “Teachers should test their students’ speaking ability from the beginning levels by incorporating the speaking skill into periodic tests” (Gonzalez, 1989, p. 3).

Teachers should establish a day and tell learners beforehand, that they are going to be tested on speaking, and tell them what exactly they are going to be tested on.

a) Suggestions for large classes

We can notice from the results of the field research that large classes are the biggest challenge faced by English teachers in Praia regarding the assessment of the speaking skill. In fact, as was discussed in the literature review section, testing speaking in large classes is a huge problem because of the limited time. Thus, in this section I will present some techniques to test speaking in large classes pointed out by some authors, such as Underhill (1987) and Heaton (1975) that I think are best suited for large classes.

The first technique that I would like to suggest is the Conversational Exchange type 4 (section 2.10.4) pointed out by Heaton. I chose this technique because, since testees can perform it as dialogue, teachers can test more than one learner simultaneously.

The second technique is Testing Speaking Using Visual Materials (section 2.12) suggested by Heaton and Underhill, which requires testees to describe pictures. This technique can be a good one to be used in large classes to test speaking since testees can be tested in pairs. For instance, the teacher gives similar pictures to testees. They begin by describing their own pictures without showing it to the other members of the group. Then they discuss the differences among the pictures.

Finally, another useful technique that I would like to suggest is the Role Play (section 2.14) pointed out by Underhill, because in this technique learners can be paired together for a role-play. Once having students working in pairs the time spent on testing them will be shorter than having them working individually. Heaton agrees that this is an effective way to test students in pairs

and groups when he states, “Another effective way of assessing a student’s ability to speak, is to give pairs or groups of students a simple task to perform” (1975, p. 95).

b) Suggestions for test design

When designing a test there are some strategies that teachers should take into account in order to avoid possible constraints. The first step that teachers have to take is to decide what kind of test they are going to use. Then, write down a list of what the test is going to cover. The next step is to think about the length of the test. Finally, teachers should decide on the marking procedure, deciding the criteria for marking the test in advance. It will be much easier if teachers establish criteria in advance, that is, decide what kind of information they are looking for.

c) Suggestions for test scoring

Regarding the test score, I would suggest the use of the two useful procedures pointed out by Madsen (1983). He suggests two methods: Holistic scoring and Objectified scoring. Holistic scoring is a technique which consists of evaluating a wide variety of criteria simultaneously. Thus, if teachers intend to evaluate more than one aspect of testees’ speech, it is recommendable for them to use this technique. However, if teachers intend to evaluate a specific area of speech, it is better to use the objectified scoring, which is easier to use. Therefore, it can be used by teachers with little specialized training and by highly trained teachers as well. As stated above, teacher can use the objective procedure to evaluate specific points of testees’ speech such as: appropriateness, fluency, grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. Thus, teachers should keep in mind which criteria they want to evaluate. (pp. 166- 173).

5.1.3 Suggestions for further research

Finally, for further studies, I would suggest research to be conducted on other islands of Cape Verde with a questionnaire designed for students in order to perceive what they think about the assessment of their speaking ability. It would be interesting to see how students feel about testing oral ability; it would also be interesting to see if students recognize the backwash effect of

oral testing on their performance.

I would also suggest a study to be conducted on the introducing of speaking assessment in the early stages of teaching English. This type of study would be much larger in scope, and would involve tracking a group of English students from the beginning of their course until the end. It would be interesting to know if appropriately administer speaking tests given to students throughout their career as students, would significantly influence their speaking ability.

Finally, I would suggest a study that looks at the different testing techniques and tries to evaluate their effectiveness for the different constraints. For example, a study could take the constraint of large classrooms and apply several different testing techniques to compare their effectiveness in terms of administration and backwash. Classroom observation along with student and teacher surveys could be implemented.

5.1.4 General Conclusion

As stated in the introduction, the main purpose of this paper is to encourage Capeverdean English teachers to test their students speaking skill. This paper concludes that it is very important to test students' speaking ability for many reasons:

First, if speaking is tested it encourages learners to speaking English in the classroom. This is good because the lack of practicing the language in the classroom can affect learners oral ability. Second, oral testing is of great importance for students' academic and professional development.

Third, it is a source of motivation for most learners. Therefore, speaking assessment is extremely important. Some authors discussed in this work state that if speaking is tested, it encourages the teaching of speaking in the classroom.

Fourth, the speaking test tells teachers whether learners are able to hold a conversation in the target language. In addition, if learners know that they will be tested on speaking, they will regard speaking as an important skill.

However, it is a difficult skill to test because there are some constraints (large classes, difficult to mark oral tests, difficult to design and difficult to separate the listening skill from the

speaking skill) claimed by researchers such as Underhill, 1987, Heaton, 1975 and Hughes, 1987. These constraints must be overcome by Cape Verdean teachers for the benefit of their students.

It is important to encourage and motivate students to speak English in the classroom by testing their oral performance regularly. Many students do not have any other chance to speak the language, except with their teachers in the classrooms. It is English teachers responsibility to develop pupils' spoken language skills because it is fundamental for their academic and professional achievements. Thus, testing speaking is an important part of this process. Therefore, further attention must be given to the issue of Capeverdean students being unable to communicate in the target language after graduating from high schools.

We can notice from figure 4.6 that a high percentage of English teachers in Praia believe that the assessment of speaking encourages learners to speak English in the classroom. However, in spite of their acknowledgement, that oral testing encourages learners to use the target language, the majority do not try to assess this skill. Indeed, many Capeverdean students regard speaking as a less important skill and do not make an effort to speak English in the classroom since they know that they will not be assessed on speaking in the same way as the reading and writing skills. Reading and writing are the most tested skills in our classrooms in relation to the speaking skill. Likewise, the results of the survey revealed that a high percentage of teachers think that speaking is a very important skill to be assessed.

It is true that speaking is a complex skill to test. However, it is testable and the difficulties can be overcome with appropriate techniques and by introducing more speaking activities in their classes. We know that one of the biggest challenge faced by Capeverdean teachers is to deal with large classes and as previously stated in this paper, the issue of testing speaking in large classes is a huge problem since each student must be tested in turn. In fact, figure 4.2 shows that the major constraint that complicates the assessment of speaking in Capeverdean EFL is the issue of large classes.

Therefore, Capeverdean English teachers in Praia need to make themselves aware of the situation and make efforts to introduce speaking assessment in spite of the difficulties. It is worthy because of its beneficial backwash effect. As language teachers, we have to find the techniques that better fit our situations in order to help our students. The most important thing to keep in mind is that, we must help our students to develop confidence in their oral ability through

the assessment of the speaking skill.

Finally, I hope that English teachers in Praia will find this work useful and will use it in their classrooms to test students speaking ability.

If spoken language is not tested it will not be taught” (Davis, p. 24)

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Appendices